



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **IDAHO BENEFITS FROM \$1 BILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Idaho counties received more than \$1 billion from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. That investment benefits every one of the state's 1.3 million residents.

Of Idaho's 44 counties, Butte County receives the highest per capita investment at \$1,483 per person, and Camas County receives the least at \$141 per person. The state's most populated area — Ada County — ranks number 31 in per capita investment, receiving \$631 in Health & Welfare dollars for every person.

The statewide average investment of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$808 for every man, woman and child residing in Idaho. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department.

The Department funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, and the Home Energy program among others.

"Even if you don't directly use a Department service you benefit from the Department's investment," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "Additional payments made to a hospital, for example, allow the facility to buy diagnostic equipment that may be used for all hospital clients, not just those who are Medicaid-eligible."

"We use the (additional) money for operating. It would degrade the health care we offer if we did not have it. We're the biggest employer in our community, so loss of the money would have a profound effect on the whole community," says Administrator Rod Jacobson of Bear Lake Memorial Hospital.

Last year, Bear Lake Memorial received \$225,386 in additional payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share because the hospital handles more Medicaid clients than the average hospital. That money can be used for any hospital purpose, so it has the potential

of providing service for any client, not just Medicaid. The money is in addition to payment for regular services to Medicaid clients.

"It is vital to us to retain that money," says Woody Laughnan, administrator of Benewah Community Hospital. "Anything less than that (money) would put safety net hospitals like us in financial jeopardy. The closest hospital to us is 55 miles away. We get several heart cases here each year, and without this hospital to stabilize them, they might not make it."

Benewah Community Hospital and Bear Lake Memorial are just two of 36 hospitals statewide which shared \$20 million in additional Medicaid money last year. Medicaid payments to Idaho hospitals for regular services and additional payments totaled \$173 million in 2003.

Medicaid also invests heavily in pharmacies throughout the state. Last year, Idaho pharmacies received nearly \$73 million in direct payments from Medicaid. Millions more are paid to hospitals, nursing homes and other providers who dispense medicine.

"Medicaid is a huge part of my business in a small store like mine," says Pharmacist Gene Boyle, owner of the Idaho Drug Company in Rigby. "Without (Medicaid) I'd be dead. A small town pharmacy like mine can't survive without it."

Ada County parents received \$6.7 million in child care subsidy payments last year. The subsidy program helps low-income working parents and parents looking for work. The program also provides a big boost for the county's 721 child care providers who participate in the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP).

Anita Leatham at Mr. Toad's Child Care Solutions in Boise serves 45 children from 28 families, 20 of the families in ICCP. She received \$138,218 in ICCP payments in the past year, which is in addition to the share parents pay. "About 50 percent of our kids are in the ICCP program," says Leatham. "There is no doubt if the program was to go away, we would be in sad shape."

Last year, the Department paid out \$28.5 million in child care payments to child care providers statewide.

"Another example is Food Stamp payments," says Kurtz. "It is a direct investment in neighborhood grocery stores which use that money to hire clerks and meat cutters."

"Food Stamps are good business for us," says Doyle Lamb, owner of Lamb's Foods in Challis. "If we didn't have that money, we would have to cut jobs. The money is spent here locally, or least a good share of it stays here."

"Food Stamps are very important to our store," says Lonnie Perry, manager of Ridley's Foods in Middleton. "It helps the community. It gives them foods, and as long as that money is coming in, we can continue to hire staff. We would definitely feel the impact if we didn't have the (Food Stamp money)."

Last year, the Department of Health and Welfare processed nearly \$73 million in Food Stamps statewide.

"It's important for people to know that the Department's investment benefits all Idaho residents. This is wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community," says Kurtz. "Those dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and create an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe communities.

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**More information on Health & Welfare's investment in every Idaho County can be found online at <http://www2.state.id.us/dhw/>**

**(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 208-334-0693 for more information.)**